



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Written Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
and

Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Health  
Wednesday, March 20, 2019 at 10:45 a.m.

By

Randall F. Holcombe, MD, MBA  
Director, University of Cancer Center

And

Michael Bruno, PhD  
Vice Chancellor for Research  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### HB 654 HD1 – RELATING TO HEALTH

Chairs Kim and Baker, Vice Chairs Kidani and Chang, and members of the Committees:

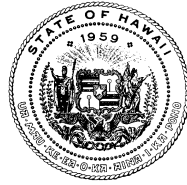
The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center strongly supports HB 654 HD1, as long as it is in addition to the University's Biennium Budget request. This measure appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center to determine whether Hawaii has the highest incidence in the country of liver and bile duct cancer due to liver fluke infection, aflatoxin ingestion, or intrahepatic bile duct dilation in Hawai'i.

The UH Cancer Center is one of only 70 institutions in the U.S. that hold the prestigious National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation, and is the only NCI-designated center in the Pacific. The NCI designation provides greater access to federal funding and research opportunities. More importantly, it gives the people of Hawai'i and the Pacific region access to innovative and potentially life-saving clinical trials without the necessity of traveling to the mainland.

The UH Cancer Center is a leader nationally in research focused on liver cancer. The State of Hawai'i ranks second in the nation in the incidence of liver cancer. While some of these cases are related to hepatitis, a known cause of this disease, the majority are not, and are related to abnormal accumulation of fat in the liver, other infectious organisms such as liver flukes, and environmental toxins. Faculty at the UH Cancer Center have been recognized as international leaders in research into the causes of liver and bile duct cancer and have been selected as members of National commissions engaged in Federal policy recommendations. Additionally, faculty affiliated with UH Cancer Center and its National Community Oncology Research Program direct several novel clinical trials for patients with liver and bile duct cancers.

The UH Cancer Center supports HB 654 HD1. Funds allocated under this proposal will be specifically allocated to advance liver cancer research. *Only the UH Cancer Center is positioned to perform this critically important research in the State of Hawai'i.*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill.



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
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**Written Testimony Only in SUPPORT of H.B. 654, HD1  
RELATING TO HEALTH**

SENATOR DONNA MERCADO KIM, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

SENATOR ROSALYN H. BAKER, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, CONSUMER PROTECTION, AND HEALTH

Hearing Date: March 20, 2019

Room Number: 229

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The bill appropriates out of the general revenues an unspecified amount  
2 for fiscal year (FY) 2019-2020 and an unspecified amount for FY 2020-2021 to the University of  
3 Hawaii. The Department of Health (DOH) defers to the University of Hawaii for  
4 implementation and fiscal implications, and to the priorities set forth in the Governor's Executive  
5 Biennium Budget request.

6 **Department Testimony:** The DOH is in support of House Bill (H.B.) 654, House Draft (HD) 1  
7 which appropriates funds to the University of Hawaii Cancer Center (UHCC) to determine  
8 whether Hawaii has the highest incidence of liver and bile duct cancer in the country due to liver  
9 fluke infection, aflatoxin ingestion, or intrahepatic bile duct dilation.

10 According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the UHCC, Hawaii has  
11 had the highest or second highest rate of liver cancer in the country in recent years. Every year  
12 in Hawaii there are one hundred eighty-four newly diagnosed cases of liver cancer, including  
13 bile duct cancer. From 2004 to 2013, available data on liver cancer indicates an annual increase  
14 in Hawaii of 2.1 percent in males and 1.3 percent in females. There are currently about one  
15 thousand patients diagnosed with liver and bile duct cancer.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hawaii Tumor Registry

1           Approximately 70 percent of liver cases in the United States could potentially be  
2 prevented through the elimination of exposure to risk factors, the most important of which are  
3 excess body weight, chronic infection with hepatitis B virus (HBV) and/or hepatitis C virus  
4 (HCV), type 2 diabetes, heavy alcohol consumption, and tobacco smoking.<sup>2</sup>

5           The DOH has been involved in statewide collaborative efforts to prevent liver cancer.  
6 The Hawaii Comprehensive Cancer Control Program convenes and facilitates the Hawaii  
7 Comprehensive Cancer Coalition (HCCC), a network of individuals and organizations that  
8 provide leadership and coordination for cancer prevention and control activities throughout the  
9 state. The Hawaii State Cancer Plan 2016 – 2020 was created by the HCCC to guide the state’s  
10 cancer control and prevention efforts and to enhance collaboration between public and private  
11 agencies and organizations. One objective in the state cancer plan is to increase HBV  
12 vaccination of susceptible at-risk adults. The DOH’s Harm Reduction Services Branch offers  
13 viral hepatitis services in collaboration with local community partners such as Hep Free Hawaii  
14 to promote liver health and increase awareness of and access to viral hepatitis services. The  
15 DOH will continue to collaborate with the UHCC on improving cancer screening rates and  
16 increasing HBV and HCV vaccination rates to reduce the burden of liver cancer in the state.

17           Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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<sup>2</sup> American Cancer Society Cancer Facts & Figures 2019. <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2019/cancer-facts-and-figures-2019.pdf>



American Cancer Society  
Cancer Action Network  
2370 Nuʻuanu Avenue  
Honolulu, Hawaiʻi 96817  
808.432.9149  
[www.acscan.org](http://www.acscan.org)

Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health  
Senator Rosalyn Baker, Chair  
Senator Stanley Chang, Vice Chair

**HB 654, HD1 – RELATING TO HEALTH**

Cory Chun, Government Relations Director – Hawaii Pacific  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 654, HD1, which appropriates an unspecified amount to the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to determine the cause of Hawaii's high incidence rate of liver cancer including live fluke infection, aflatoxin ingestion, and intrahepatic bile duct dilation. Effective 7/1/50.

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) is the nation's leading cancer advocacy organization. ACS CAN works with federal, state, and local government bodies to support evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem.

We recognize that cancer research is the engine behind our ongoing progress in the fight against cancer. Research offers hope to people who face cancer – for better treatments, for more opportunities to prevent and detect the disease early on, and for improved quality of life for those already diagnosed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

**HB-654-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/16/2019 12:04:42 AM

Testimony for HRE on 3/20/2019 10:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Michael	Testifying for Adon Renewables	Support	No

Comments:

We strongly support HB654

**HB-654-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/16/2019 3:51:39 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/20/2019 10:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
JOHN KNOX	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

March 20, 2019

Aloha Chairs Baker and Kim, Vice Chairs Chang and Kidani, and members of the Senate Committee on Commerce Consumer Protection and Health and the Committee on Higher Education.

My name is John Knox, and I am a Waimānalo resident testifying as a private individual in support of HB 654, HD1, to begin systematic research into why Hawai'i leads the nation in liver bile/duct cancer incidence.

It does not greatly affect our economy that an average 184 Hawai'i residents per year die, often painfully, of this cancer. It should, however, affect our consciences that we have not yet carefully researched why we're number one in the nation for our population.

This is a straightforward and common sense research appropriation, and I respectfully request your support for it.

Thank you for consideration of this testimony!

**HB-654-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/16/2019 10:07:24 AM

Testimony for HRE on 3/20/2019 10:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Thaddeus Pham	Individual	Oppose	No

Comments:

Aloha,

Although I appreciate the good intent of this bill, I am in opposition to its enactment. As an individual whose family members, loved ones, and community members have been affected by liver cancer, I am uncertain as to the merit of this bill.

The known causes for most liver cancer in Hawaii--specifically viral hepatitis and non alcoholic steatohepatitis)--are well known and yet still under-funded. I think it is irresponsible to allocate state funds to investigate rare, unsubstantiated causes of liver cancer, rather than dedicate public health funds to known, preventable diseases such as hepatitis B and C. I wonder if the research group who would benefit from this bill reached out to local organizations such as Hep Free Hawaii, who focus on these matters.

Please see the link below for more information about hepatitis B and C in Hawaii <https://app.box.com/s/g0b9yhu04zjoicezt11j8m4tr3woyvuo>

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Thaddeus Pham

**HB-654-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/18/2019 5:16:43 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/20/2019 10:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Shannon Elies	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha,

As a kama'aina of this great state and an individual who personally has had too many loved ones pass away from cancer, two of which were confirmed liver cancer, I strongly believe that any measure that can be taken to prevent or diminish this disease must be taken. We have a chance to find a possible cause for the abnormally high rates of liver cancer in Hawaii by expounding on the research already laid out before us by the scientific community.

These statistics cannot be ignored, and if there is any warning or caution we can give to the public because of the important research that this funding will provide, it will inevitably save countless lives. This funding is crucial to the wellbeing of our entire state and the longevity of our keiki.

Mahalo



**HB-654-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/19/2019 1:53:49 AM

Testimony for HRE on 3/20/2019 10:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Michael Higgins	Individual	Support	Yes

## Comments:

My name is Michael Higgins. I am 55 years old, and I am very grateful to be alive to testify on this matter. In October 2018, I was diagnosed with bile duct cancer and on November 2nd, I had a pancreaticoduodenectomy otherwise known as a Whipple procedure. Although it sounds like a cute name, the surgeons had to remove my gall bladder, duodenum, ½ my stomach, ¾ of my pancreas, most of my bile duct, 16 lymph nodes and some of my small intestines. Then they had to connect everything remaining to make my digestive system work again. One week before my surgery, I had an episode called cholangitis which is the inflammation of the bile duct. Bacteria was backing up into my body due to the blockage and I became septic. I also had a minor heart attack due to the stress I was going through. After regaining my strength, I had my surgery to remove the cancerous tumors. One surgery turned into three due to complications, and I visited the ICU several times. I remained in the hospital for 44 days under constant care and could not eat for about 35 days. My medical treatment was excellent, but my questions of how I got this go unanswered. Being born and raised here, my diet was a wide mix of local and worldwide dishes. I don't smoke, rarely drank alcohol and led a busy life. I was always active with baseball as a kid, paddling as a teen/young adult and my work keeps me physically active indoors and out. My liver was fine and I did not have any form of hepatitis, so I'm constantly wondering what led to my type of cancer.

The prognosis for patients that have bile duct cancer is very depressing, but I refuse to read into the negativity and try to keep busy with an active life. My loving and supportive wife along with our two daughters keep me driven to be around for their wedding days. I'm now undergoing the early stages of chemotherapy and have another 4 months to go. It beats me up at times, but I'm letting it do its thing to wipe out any potential cancer left in me.

Despite my diagnosis and changed body, I am so grateful to be alive due to having detected this early on. For many out there, the cancer is too far advanced and surgery may not even be an option. I ask that you pass Senate Bill 887 and House Bill 654 to make available the necessary funds for research, education and testing for our local population which has the highest rate of bile duct cancer in the United States.

Sincerely,

Michael Higgins

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, CONSUMER PROTECTION, AND HEALTH

Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair  
Senator Stanley Chang, Vice Chair

RE: HB 654, HD1

Wednesday, March 20, 2019, 10:45AM, Room 229

Aloha Respective Senators for the Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Health. My name is Kristin Kaniaupio and I am testifying in full support of House Bill 654, HD1 “Relating to Health.”

On July 7, 2018, the world I knew was flipped upside down. It was on this day that my brother-in-law received the devastating news that he was diagnosed with cancer. The most frustrating part of this day was that the doctors at the Queen’s Medical Center were stumped on the actual diagnosis. At the time, the only information the doctors had complete confidence in was that my brother-in-law had about a dozen tumors located in his lungs, stomach lining, ribs, colon, and liver. After a week of gruesome tests ranging from bloodwork, to bone scans, to x-rays, CT scans, and even a colonoscopy, the place of origin was yet to be determined. The only information doctors could confirm was that my brother’s best option was to start with a generic chemotherapy treatment in the hopes of shrinking something. As a sister who felt completely helpless, that information was not adequate for me to absorb. I quickly made arrangements for him to receive a second opinion at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota within two weeks. I figured my brother deserved to find the cause of his potential ailing health. After two days of more tests, my brother-in-law was given the news that he indeed had been diagnosed with stage 4 bile duct cancer. Unfortunately, the oncologist at the Mayo Clinic told us that this diagnosis will take his life. We were stunned and heartbroken to say the least. My brother-in-law never smoked, rarely touched alcohol, and maintained good physical health as he was employed as an officer with the Honolulu Police Department. The only indicator that could have possibly impacted my brother’s cancer was a history of ulcerative colitis which he suffered from 10 years prior. The oncologist also mentioned that the symptoms for bile duct cancer only present themselves once a patient has reached stage 4 in which the prognosis is ALWAYS lethal. My brother suffered for almost seven months in constant pain hoping for more time. Unfortunately, he lost his battle on Sunday, February 3, 2019. He was 36 years young, married, with two children ages nine and ten years young.

According to the American Cancer Society, approximately 190 people will die from either liver or bile duct cancer this year in the state of Hawaii (American Cancer Society, 2019). These

types of cancers are on the rise and more and more families like mine are losing hope for a cure. I believe it is absolutely necessary to allow the University of Hawaii Cancer Research Center to obtain funding to determine whether Hawaii has the highest incidence of liver and bile duct cancer in the country due to liver fluke infection, aflatoxin ingestion, or intrahepatic bile duct dilation. Hopefully this study will help us move one step closer into discovering the cause for such a horrible disease that does not discriminate. I urge you to support House Bill 654, HD1 "Relating to Health." Please don't let my brother's life and many others be another statistic. Give families like mine the hope to enjoy more memories with our loved ones for years to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Kristin Kaniaupio

## **Testimony in Support of HB 654, HD1**

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair Committee on Higher Education  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice-Chair Committee on Higher Education  
Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair Committee on Commerce, Consumer  
Protection, and Health  
Senator Stanley Chang, Vice-Chair Committee on Commerce,  
Consumer Protection, and Health

From: Dyan M. Medeiros

Re: In support of HB 654, HD 1

Hearing Date: March 20, 2019

Hearing Time: 10:45 a.m.

Hearing Place: Conference Room 229

Senator Kim, Senator Baker, Senator Kidani, Senator Chang, and  
Members of the Committees,

I submit this testimony as a private citizen in strong support of HB  
654, HD1.

My father, Albert P. Medeiros, Jr., was diagnosed on August 14,  
2018 with bile duct cancer (cholangiocarcinoma). He passed away 5 months  
later at the age of 71. This is not unusual. This type of cancer is incurable and  
usually fatal in less than one year. Hawai'i appears to have higher incidents of  
this type of cancer than the rest of the country.

His loss has been devastating to our family. He was a single father  
and the only parent my sister and I can remember. But for this cancer, my father  
was in good health. His parents lived to be far older than 71 and his oldest  
sibling is 80. But for this cancer, he would still be with us today and for a long  
time to come.

My father suffered from none of the common causes of bile duct  
cancer (hepatitis, heavy alcohol consumption, or liver disease). He was born and  
raised in Hawai'i. He was an avid waterman and fisherman and loved to eat fish.

If the people of Hawai'i are suffering from this horrible form of cancer  
due to one or more of the conditions that the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center  
wishes to study, we deserve to know that. We deserve to know so our people can  
protect themselves and their loved ones.

I urge you to fund HB654, HD1, change the effective year to 2019,  
and then pass it in the strongest possible terms. Thank you.

**HB-654-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/19/2019 11:05:46 AM

Testimony for HRE on 3/20/2019 10:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
shelly	Individual	Support	No

## Comments:

Representative Luke, Representative Cullen, and Members of the Committee, I submit this testimony as a private citizen in strong support of HB 654, HD1.

My mother was diagnosed with cholangiocarcinoma in 2006 and she passed a year later in September of 2007 at 75 years old. Prior to her diagnosis, she was extremely vibrant. She was mentally and physically strong. She loved her family and sacrificed unselfishly for us. Due to this cancer, she suffered horribly. Bile duct cancer causes great and constant pain to its victim. And families are left feeling hopeless as there is not much information and support on this particular disease.

We were told by doctors and through research we knew that cholangiocarcinoma is a rare form of cancer. Affecting only 1/1,000,000. At that time I thought Hawaii must have not more than 15 cases. I was stunned to meet other families affected by bile duct cancer. It didn't add up. This discovery of Hawaii's disparity of cholangiocarcinoma cases explains the discrepancy. Now it makes sense, and with it the realization that we have a problem in this state.

Every life is significant and this funding would allow the research necessary to prevent and treat bile duct cancer. Lives will be saved.

I support this bill and humbly ask for your support as well.

Mahalo nui loa,  
Shelly Shimabukuro

**HB-654-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/18/2019 8:06:36 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/20/2019 10:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
John Taira	Individual	Support	No

## Comments:

My name is John Taira and I support HB654. My mother Chiyoko Taira, passed away from bile duct cancer in September of 2007 at the age of 76. After we received the diagnosis, she fought for 4-5 months before succumbing to the disease. Hawaii has the highest rate per capita of bile duct cancer so let's appropriate research funds to minimize the impact on our citizens. Thank you.